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The Baltimore Sun

February 11, 1998, Wednesday, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: LOCAL (NEWS), Pg. 1B

LENGTH: 747 words

HEADLINE: Saying so long to city bullies; Secession: Two senators have introduced a bill to allow a straw vote this fall in nine Eastern Shore counties on whether they want to split from Maryland and form the 51st state.

BYLINE: Michael Dresser, SUN STAFF

BODY:

Frustrated by government regulation and a perceived lack of respect from big-city "bullies," a pair of Eastern Shore senators is pushing for a regionwide straw ballot on secession from Maryland.

A bill introduced this week by Republican Sens. Richard F. Colburn and J. Lowell Stoltzfus would let residents of the nine Eastern Shore counties cast votes in this fall's election on whether they want to leave the Free State and become the 51st state.

The secessionist senators recounted a long list of grievances against the regime in Annapolis, ranging from gun control to wetlands preservation laws to former Gov. William Donald Schaefer's infamous 1991 description of the Shore as a less-than-polite term for outhouse.

But both agreed that the last straw was Gov. Parris N. Glendening's proposal to introduce mandatory farm pollution controls as part of his program to combat toxic Pfiesteria outbreaks in Maryland waters.

"The basic difference is that on the Eastern Shore we believe in the constitutional right of personal property," said Colburn. "Obviously, that philosophy is not shared in the Maryland General Assembly and with Governor Glendening's administration."

Proposals to separate the Eastern Shore from the rest of Maryland are nothing new. Every few decades since the 1830s, such legislation has surfaced with varying degrees of seriousness. The last semiserious effort was in the early 1970s, when a similar proposal was sponsored by state Sen.

Robert Bauman -- who would later be elected to Congress.

"It's been coming up since 1776," said Lloyd "Hot Dog" Simpkins, 77, a retired Somerset County Circuit Court judge who still hears cases. "It's a ridiculous way to get publicity. Can you imagine the Eastern Shore as a separate state? Where the hell would we get the money to pay our bills?"

In Stoltzfus' case, publicity does seem the main concern. The Somerset County lawmaker says with a smile he

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wants to "send a serious message" that the Shore has had enough of government regulation from Annapolis.

"We're getting a little tired of slick Montgomery County lawyers trying to write legislation trying to tell us how to run our business," said Stoltzfus, the Senate's leading champion of the Eastern Shore's chicken industry.

But Colburn, at least outwardly, seems eerily serious.

"After a while, you get tired of being bullied by Beltway bullies," the Dorchester County senator said. "We don't have the votes to be successful here."

In an interview in his Annapolis office, surrounded by portraits of Abraham Lincoln, Colburn said he has picked out one important symbol for his new state -- a variation on the Confederate battle flag with a single white star on a field of navy blue.

Colburn, who said Salisbury would make a logical capital, said he knows what he would call the new state.

"We'll probably settle for Maryland and rename this Western Maryland," said Colburn. That is, unless the southern counties of Delaware and the Eastern Shore of Virginia can be persuaded to join the 51st state. Then it would be called Delmarva, he said.

Colburn said he's been thinking about secession from Maryland since he was a boy, when his father showed him the writings of Baltimore's H. L. Mencken, who dubbed the Eastern Shore "trans-Choptankia."

"The whole area is a lush stomping ground for knavish politicians, prehensile professional patriots and whooping soul savers," Mencken wrote.

Despite such provocations, Colburn says his secession movement will remain a peaceful revolt. If Eastern Shore voters approve secession in a nonbinding vote this year, he hopes the notion would go to a statewide referendum in 2000 or 2001.

"This is following legal procedures," he said. "Hopefully, they'll let our people go legally because we don't feel we're wanted."

He predicted a vote would show strong support for secession.

But leading Shore Democrats discounted that notion.

"I really don't think that it will fly," said the Rev. Clarence Hawkins, president of the Board of County Commissioners in Kent County. "The last time I heard about it, it was a joke."

Del. Ronald A. Guns, a Cecil County Democrat, certainly took it that way. "It's an idea who's time came -- and went," he said.

However, Guns did say that if secession did take place, he would stake a claim in favor of his hometown of Elkton as the capital rather than Salisbury.

"There we go," said Guns, "the North and the South."

Pub Date: 2/11/98

LOAD-DATE: February 12, 1998